

“Relief and Joy”

Nehemiah 8:1-6, 16-18

Week of October 29, 2023

Opening Question:

- Tell about your relationship to the Bible, God’s Word. Have you known it all your life or are you new to it? Is much of it a mystery to you or do you feel you have a pretty good grasp of it? Do you find it dry and dull or new and exciting?

Pray this prayer (one person or the whole group together):

Lord, as we come together to study your Word, we bring all of who we are with our needs, our hopes and our expectations. Meet us here in the power and presence of your Holy Spirit. Give us insight and understanding as we listen carefully for your voice. And then give us courage and conviction to align our lives with the way of Jesus. We pray in his name. Amen.

Read aloud this introduction:

The people of Jerusalem and the surrounding areas, under the leadership of Nehemiah, have come together to rebuild the walls and gates. In the face of opposition, they have not backed down. They have also come face to face with some of the broken-down places of their individual and corporate lives and have made amends. We see in Nehemiah 6:16 the testimony of all that has been accomplished in these words “they realized that this work had been done with the help of our God.”

Chapter 7 of Nehemiah contains the genealogical records of those who had been first to return from the exile. Before moving on, take a moment and let your eyes scan through chapter 7. What do you note that is of interest?

- Ponder for a moment these words recorded about Hananiah in Neh. 7:2. He was one of those put in charge “because he was a man of integrity and feared God more than most people do.” What do you think characterized his life and how was it seen by those around him?
- Why does Nehemiah bother with this genealogical record? He tells us in Neh. 7:5 “So my God put it into my heart”. Think about that phrase for a moment. Has God ever put something into your heart for you to do?

Read Nehemiah 8: 1-18 aloud.

Some things to know:

- The seventh month (Neh. 8:1) corresponds to our September/October. It was the month of Nisan (March/April) when Nehemiah first spoke with King Artaxerxes about his desire to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls.
- The Book of the Law of Moses (8:1) probably refers to the Torah, i.e. the Pentateuch (first five books of our Bible).
- Neh. 8:14-17 refers to *Sukkot*, the Festival of Booths or the Festival of Tabernacles See Leviticus 23:33-43.

Questions for Exploration:

- What do you notice about this remarkable reading of the law?
- What do you think is the significance of naming those who stood to Ezra’s right and left as he read the Law?
- What sensory elements are present in this account? Sights, smells, activity, sounds?
- What did the people do? What was their response?

Questions for Pressing it Out:

- How does this account inform your own thoughts about the importance of God's Word?
- Why were the people weeping as they listened to the words of the Law? (8:9) Have you ever been so touched by something in Scripture that it brought you to tears?
- Neh. 8:12 says the people celebrated "because they now understood the words that had been made known to them." Has there ever been a time when something in the Bible was made clear to you in such a way that it became an "aha" moment?
- What might God be prompting in you as you consider your relationship to the written Word? Any "next steps"?

Closing Prayer (pray together as a group or have one person lead):

Creator God, from the beginning of time, you have revealed yourself as the One who brings order out of chaos. You take what is broken and make it into something new and beautiful. Build and restore us, O Lord. Take the broken-down places of our lives and our world and build them up, not so we can hide behind walls of protection, but that from places of peace and safety, we can testify to your amazing grace and love that makes all things new.